

Certified Forage Tidbits

Seasonal Summary of the Montana Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage Program
ISSUE 03 DECEMBER 2017



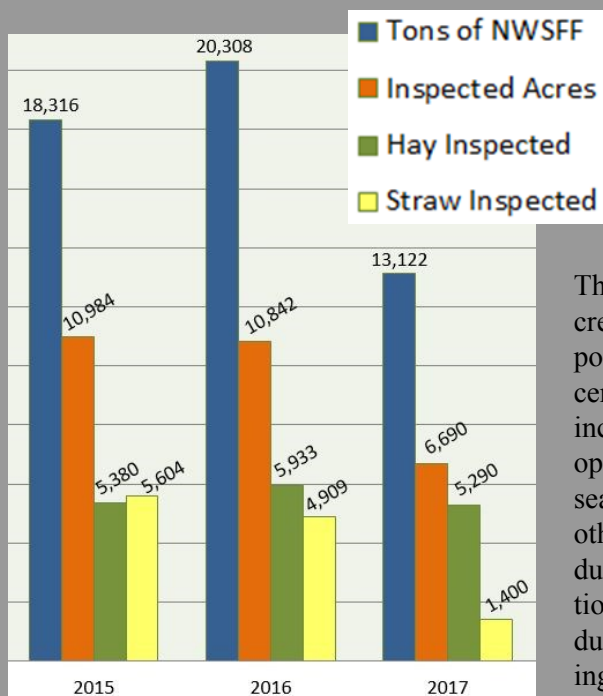
Lewis Harrell of Hilger cutting certified hay even with a dry spring.



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2017 Certified Forage Season Summary



After each growing season, the Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage (NWSFF) Program analyzes the number of acres inspected by field inspectors. The graph shows the season end summary for three years.

This summer had a significant decrease in straw acres inspected; one possible reason for fewer acres of certified straw produced may be the increased need of feed for cattle operations due to the extreme fire season Montana experienced. Two other decreases this year: new producers and total producer participation. In 2016 there were 40 new producers and 191 producers participating in the NWSFF Program.

Certified Hay Production:

5,290 acres inspected
5,166 acres certified
10,715 tons produced

Certified Straw Production:

1,400 acres inspected
1,391 acres certified
2,407 tons produced

Certified Forage Producers:

169 producers participated
29 new producers

The Montana NRCS Soil Health Strategy

Mission: healthy, functioning soil as the foundation for all working lands in Montana.

While the U.S. agricultural industry has made significant strides in improving farming practices to decrease soil erosion and improve water quality, we still face numerous challenges in the 21st century. Herbicide resistant weeds, large fluctuations of input costs, overuse of inputs and the resulting environmental degradation, continued erosion, and new diseases and insects all threaten producers' livelihoods. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS), created during the Dust Bowl era, concentrated on ways to decrease soil erosion. Today, we recognize we have to consider more than getting to "T," tolerable soil loss levels, for successful conservation. The average annual erosion on Montana cropland was 11.4 tons per acre in 1987. Twenty years later, in 2007, the average annual erosion rate was 6.4 tons per acre. This is progress. It is keeping rivers and air cleaner, but it is treating a symptom rather than the problem of unhealthy soil.

We must change our minds about soil health and how it functions. Many of our problems, regardless of land use, are actually symptoms of the main problem, **dysfunctional soil**. A healthy functional soil does not erode, keeps pests in check, supplies plants and animals with what they need when they need it, and provides for

long-term sustainable systems. A soil health approach to conservation planning can better address the opportunities we have to improve resource conditions.

Soil is a living factory of macroscopic and microscopic organisms that need food to eat and places to live. Without these organisms, soil does not function efficiently. These organisms control the soil's ability to supply water and nutrients to plants, and they ultimately determine how successful

ranching, forestry, and farming operations will be. A healthy soil contains a multitude of individual organisms, including bacteria, protozoa, nematodes, fungi, molds, and yeasts and can be decomposers, pathogens, parasites, predators or grazers. Beetles, mites, and small animals feed on the tinier creatures to cycle nutrients.

The challenges are to harvest sunlight through photosynthesis, allow micro-organisms to break down carbon from plant residues, and cycle nutrients so they are available to growing plants in order to manage farms, ranches, and forests sustainable for food and fiber in the future. Managing for soil health and improved soil function is mostly a matter of maintaining a suitable habitat for the countless number of crea-

tures that comprise the soil food web. That means:

- ◆ disturbing the soil as little as possible,
- ◆ growing as many different species of plants as practical,
- ◆ keeping living roots in the soil as often as possible,
- ◆ keeping the soil covered all the time with plants and plant residues, and
- ◆ managing livestock to benefit the soil.

Managing for soil health has implications regardless of land use; range, crop, pasture, hay, and forest lands can all benefit. *The Montana NRCS Soil Health Strategy*, Nov. 2015, pg 2.

USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

You can download the full Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Strategy for Montana at: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/mt/soils/health/> or you can enter "MT NRCS Soil Health Strategy" in a web based search engine and it will find the document. It is a relative short document at four pages, but has more information about what NRCS is doing to help improve soil health in Montana.

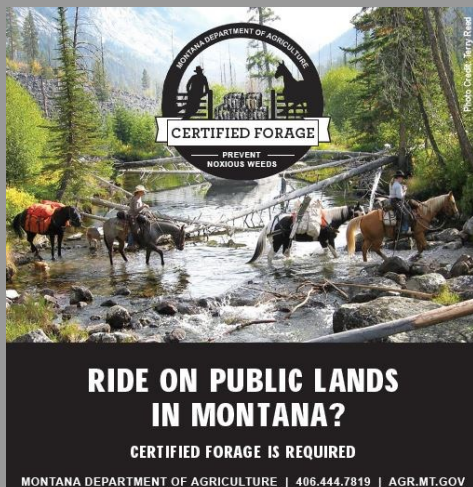
Contact your local NRCS office near you for more information about soil health and what steps you can take to improve your soil. Each county in Montana has an NRCS office. NRCS provides America's farmers and ranchers with financial and technical assistance to voluntarily put conservation on the ground.



Advertisement, Promotion & Awareness

The Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage (NWSFF) Program is tasked with making sure people are aware of the certified forage requirement on Montana's public lands. I did this by placing print ads in the *Bugle* magazine, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's (RMEF) journal, for the May-June issue (center graphic) and the September - October issue. The *Bugle* magazine has a current readership of more than 555,000. Current RMEF membership is at 222,325 of which 63% own land and 35% ride horses. This statistic helped me make the decision to place two ads

in this magazine. The end result is for those people that come to Montana to hunt for elk or other big game with horses, mules, or pack animals will be more informed about the type of feed they need to have and where to find certified forage. Another avenue that I will be looking into is digital media advertisement in RMEF's Elk Country Newsletter, which is published online monthly to 125,000 subscribers. Contact me at kantonick2@mt.gov if you have comments about these ads or if you have ideas on promoting the program.



More Billboard Ads

The NWSFF Program again this year worked with Lamar Outdoor Advertising on placing the "Hunt on Public Lands?" outdoor ad. This billboard ad was placed at three locations. The first location is on US 93 South near Hamilton and reaches traffic headed to Darby. The second location is on I-15 near Great Falls and reaches traffic headed to Helena. The third location is on I-90 near Park City and this billboard (below) reaches traffic headed to Big Timber and Bozeman. These billboards were up by mid-August and will be done by mid-November. The goal of the three month advertisement is to educate public land users about the requirement of certified forage and where to find it.

Hunt on Public Lands?





Certified forage is REQUIRED!

Find certified forage products at: **AGR.mt.gov**



Photo by: Terry Reed

Redesigned Certified Forage Brochure!

It's here! A redesigned brochure to help promote certified forage to those folks that own horses, mules, and other livestock. Certified hay and straw are good tools for noxious weed prevention. The goal for this brochure is to get it out to feed stores for their customers to hopefully influence them to Buy Smarter! As usual, contact me if you know places to distribute this brochure, kantonick2@mt.gov.



Noxious Weed Prevention Starts with You!

Noxious weed control starts with making informed decisions about how to protect your land from noxious weeds. Montana law requires landowners to manage state listed noxious weeds from spreading or going to seed on their property. One way landowners with livestock can protect their land from noxious weeds is to *Buy Smarter* and feed MT certified forage. When you purchase certified products (hay, straw, whole oats, pellets, and cubes) you are buying forage that has been certified as noxious weed seed free. By making the decision to *Buy Smarter* you are helping prevent the spread of noxious weeds!

The use of certified forage is not required on private lands, but is a great noxious weed PREVENTION tool!

Certified Forage Benefits.

In 1993, Montana's legislators realized that the natural resources of the state needed to be protected from noxious weeds and their seeds, so they passed the Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage Act.

- Inspected for noxious and regional weeds.
- Poisonous plants are not allowed in NWSFF.

Reasons to Buy Smarter:

- Required on public lands.
- Fields where certified forage is harvested from must be inspected every year.
- The cost of preventing noxious weeds is much cheaper than the costs associated with noxious weed control.

- Choosing certified forage protects your animals from toxic or poisonous plants or weeds.
- Reduces new noxious weeds from being introduced onto private property.
- Feeding certified forage helps protect county fairsgrounds during 4-H and rodeo events.

Twine:

Blue and orange twine is an approved marker for baled noxious weed seed free hay or straw. Producers are responsible for marking each bale with twine as certified.

Tags:

Small red tags are also an approved marker for hay or straw baled as certified noxious weed seed free. Each tag is uniquely numbered as a way to identify the producer and the inspector that certified the field. Tags must be on each bale.

Labels:

Orange adhesive labels are used as approved markers for certified bagged feeds, such as pellets, cubes, and grain. These labels are also individually identified by a number to show the feed and the facility was certified by an approved inspector.

Transportation Certificates:

When you *Buy Smarter* and choose certified forage that is baled, marked with twine or tags, make sure to request a transportation certificate from the producer. This document provides authenticity of certification between the producer and the customer. The certificate has important information as to what year the hay or straw was inspected, the inspector that certified the field, and specifies about the hay.

Teff Grass Hay: Low Carb Option for Horses

By: Natalie Shaw, Low Carb Horse Hay (LCHH) Founder

The forage needs of the horse community are changing. The increasing urbanization of the horse and human alike has led to shifts in basic management practices including forage needs. For the most part, horses have become more sedentary while also enjoying the benefits of improved nutrition. This calorie imbalance has led to an explosion of over-weight horses. At the same time, advances in veterinary medicine have led to better understanding of metabolic issues related to obesity. Researchers have also identified a relationship between these metabolic issues to the devastating disease of the hoof known as laminitis. One veterinary researcher estimated that nearly 20% of horses are overweight or obese predisposing them to laminitis. That means 1 in 5 horse customers may be in search of low-carb hay.

Teff grass hay has long been recognized as a potential hay source for horses at risk for laminitis due to its relatively low carbs and moderate digestible energy values. Teff grass is a summer annual species, but it germinates quickly and is usually ready for first harvest at the boot or early head stage 45-55 days after planting. Subsequent cuttings are usually ready for harvest in 28-35 days, depending upon growing conditions and region grown.

You can contact Natalie Shaw at natalie@lowcarbhorsehay.com or at 406-599-7694 if you want to find out more information about her low carb teff hay research. Natalie studies at Washington State University and has worked in the equine nutrition industry for 12 years.

NWSFF Advisory Council

The Noxious Weed Seed Free Forage (NWSFF) Program has an Advisory Council to help advise the MT Department of Agriculture (MDA) on administering the NWSFF Program. The council is composed of 10 voting members: four certified forage producers, two county weed district reps., one livestock/ag rep., one processed forage rep., one outfitter/guide rep., and the Director of MDA. There are also two nonvoting ex officio members as well as several agency representatives. The council meets once a year and that meeting is in February in Helena at MDA. Meeting details will be on the department's website: agr.mt.gov

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406.444.3144 • Fax: 406.444.5409 • agr@mt.gov • www.agr.mt.gov

